

Iowa Outdoors

Iowa Department of Natural Resources
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CLEAR LAKE RESEARCH PROJECT SEARCHES FOR CARP SOLUTION

By Lowell Washburn

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Fishing turned profitable at Cerro Gordo County's Clear Lake last week as contract commercial fishermen netted and removed more than 20 tons of rough fish from north central Iowa's largest and most important fishery. But before the corralled pests were officially evicted from the lake, biologists took time to examine each and every fish to see if they still contained all their natural parts. More specifically, fisheries workers were looking for missing fins.

Late last May, researchers working with Iowa State University and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources were successful in capturing a "control group" of 3,000 adult carp. After being permanently marked by the removal of a single swim fin, the fish were released back into Clear Lake to rejoin their marauding comrades. The aim of the cooperative joint venture is to enable scientists to establish a reliable population estimate of how many rough fish actually exist in Clear Lake.

Although the idea of releasing thousands of undesirable fish back into Clear Lake may at first seem appalling, down the road it could pay dividends in terms of overall water quality enhancement as well as in the improvement of angling success for walleye and other popular game fish.

Of all the foreign pests to invade American waters, none have been more successful or created more havoc than the common carp. Highly adaptable and extremely

prolific, individual females lay up to a half million eggs each June. Carp uproot desirable aquatic vegetation, suspend sediments, and cloud water. In the process of lowering water quality in Iowa lakes and rivers, carp also inflict incalculable damage to valuable sport fisheries. It is hoped that Clear Lake's ongoing carp study will provide insight on controlling rough fish populations across the state.

During follow up, large scale netting operations -- such as last week's haul -- biologists record the number of marked [fin clipped] fish recaptured and then compare it to the total number of carp netted. The DNR hopes to utilize commercial fishing activities to put enough netting pressure on rough fish to significantly impact future populations. Once actual rough fish numbers are known, biologists can better gauge the project's success.

On this go round fin clipped "control" carp weren't as fortunate as they were last May. This time, instead of being released back into Clear Lake, the scaly bottom feeders were loaded and trucked to New York City fish markets where they'll soon be converted to frozen patties.

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PHEASANT HUNTING EXPECTED TO IMPROVE AS MORE CORN IS HARVESTED

BOONE – Stepping through the 10 acres of the restored wetland in south central Iowa, the two dozen flushing hens and six roosters was a sight to behold. Two weeks earlier only three pheasants flushed from this same area. Why the difference? The amount of nearby standing corn was reduced by 75 percent.

The Iowa corn harvest is nearing completion in northern third of Iowa, but for the rest of the state, anywhere from 30 to 50 percent of the corn is still standing in the field, offering Iowa pheasants a lot of refuge from hunters.

"We are going to have some good pheasant hunting but we have to get the crops down," said Todd Bogenschutz, upland biologist for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. Pheasant hunting over the Thanksgiving is tradition with many Iowa families and, if the crop harvest continues at its current pace, the holiday should offer some of the best hunting of the year in many parts of the state.

Many pheasants have not been hunted yet because of the late harvest. "We are going to have a lot of new birds as the corn comes out and that should provide for some good hunting," Bogenschutz said.

Bogenschutz said hunters may want to avoid hunting bottomland near rivers that

flooded last summer and concentrate more on upland habitat, like wetlands, fencerows, terraces or any land in the Conservation Reserve Program.

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ICE ANGLERS CHECKING GEAR, HOPING FOR COLD SNAP

DES MOINES – Nighttime temperatures across Iowa dipped into the low to middle teens which put a thin layer of ice on some north Iowa lakes and sent many die hard ice anglers to their basements to pull out the fishing gear. Small wetlands across north Iowa have been freezing for several weeks, but reopen during the day as the weather warms.

For many north Iowa lakes the water temperature is in the middle 30s and with the daytime and nighttime temperatures bouncing like a yo-yo above and below the freezing point for the next week, don't expect to be ice fishing by Thanksgiving.

"The water temps are there and if we get the right night temps and the days stay at or below freezing, then it won't take long for these lakes to ice over," said Scott Grummer, fisheries biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources at Clear Lake.

While ice anglers patiently wait for winter to arrive now would be a good time to check the ice fishing gear so when ice finally comes, they are ready to hit the lake running.

Check the auger and make sure the blades are sharp. Make sure the gas powered auger runs before hiking a half mile out on the lake for its first use. Set up the portable shanty and air it out and make sure mice have not called it home for the last seven months. Put on new fishing line and check the supply of propane.

Once that is done, all there is left to do is to wait and hope for cold weather.

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